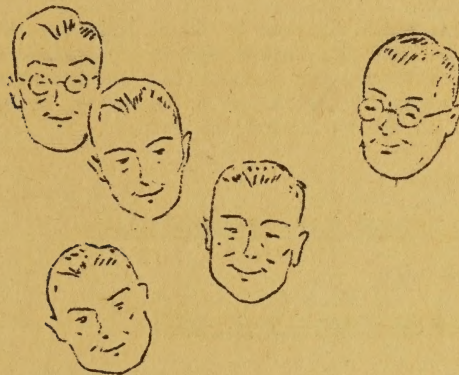


3
+ NEW CO-OP LEADERS
VOICE THEIR THOUGHTS;



A Report of Discussion
on
Co-op Education Work at Co-op Management Conference,
March 20-25, 1950, Washington, D. C.

USDA
LIB

CO-OP LEADERS HOLD GROUP DISCUSSIONS

One of the most vital parts of the REA co-op management conference at REA headquarters, Washington, D. C., March 20-25, 1950, concerned member education and community relations.

To facilitate discussion of these problems, the new managers and board members attending the conference broke up into five groups. Each group discussed one broad phase of member or community relations, with the results shown on these pages.

These discussions, while limited by time, indicate that new leaders, too, recognize the need for better member understanding of cooperative principles and functions. They underline the importance of dealing with member and community relations in concrete, understandable terms. Discussions were on the following subjects:

Group 1. How to Develop Member Responsibility.

Group 2. How to Build Community Goodwill.

Group 3. How to Keep Members Informed.

Group 4. Making Better Use of Power.

Group 5. How to Offset Opposition Propaganda.

APR 10 1951

RECEIVED

756378

THE DELEGATES REPORT

Delegate reporting: Mark Stenson, Manager, Cherry-Todd Electric Cooperative, Mission, South Dakota.

Group 1. HOW TO DEVELOP MEMBER RESPONSIBILITY.

Job Requires Planning

Active member participation in the affairs of the co-op is not only desirable but necessary if the co-op is to grow and the members are to feel pride of ownership in its growth. To get members interested, they must first be informed of their rights and responsibilities as members. Following are suggested ways to stimulate such an interest:

Education Program

The newsletter can be used to cite and thank members who assist the co-op management by reporting outages. It can also be used to widen interest among members in the work of the co-op. The co-op's bylaws should be circulated among members together with a clear, simple explanation of what each section means. It is important, too, that statewide radio programs be utilized to furnish members with news about weather, farm news and questions and answers about rural electrification.

Maintaining Member Interest

Once the importance of taking an active part in co-op affairs is firmly implanted in the members' minds, it is important that such interest be sustained. This can be done by effective annual meetings, establishment of the Capital Credits Plan and explanation of what it means to members, plans for working with youth, and district and area meetings to talk over specific problems confronting the members. Members should be encouraged to participate in maintenance of the electric system. Brush and tree-cutting parties in which all or many members take part offer one way of nourishing member interest.

Women Should Take an Active Part

Use as many member committees as possible in handling co-op activities. Make sure that women serve on these committees as well as men. It is also a good idea to have a standing committee of women only, devoting their attention to developing ways and means of bringing more women into co-op work. In this way, co-op management builds a feeling of joint responsibility among husband and wife.

Delegate reporting: Lloyd Aten, Manager, Bonhomme Yankton Electric Association,
Tabor, South Dakota

Group 2. HOW TO BUILD COMMUNITY GOODWILL.

Get Story Across

Take an active interest in the community and show how the co-op has contributed to community betterment. Educate the public and civic leaders relative to the co-op program for better rural living and how this program is stimulating more business for the community. Here are some ways to do it:

Meet with Civic Leaders and Employees

Arrange for monthly meetings with local business people. Invite them to attend co-op meetings and participate in co-op discussions.

Plan for periodic meetings of the co-op staff. Board members and the Manager should see to it that the objectives and purposes of the rural electrification program are fully understood by all co-op employees as these employees come in daily contact with members and other people in the community. Build a spirit of cooperativeness among the staff that will spread throughout the community.

Use Press and Radio

Co-ops can collectively sponsor ads in the local press to help combat opposition propaganda. Establish personal contacts with editors and radio station managers. Cooperate with them by asking in which ways you can help them find good stories and feature material.

Furnish editors with unusual stories about power use and ways in which the co-op has contributed to business income in the community.

Plan statewide radio programs for bringing the co-op story to the public. This is also an excellent medium for keeping members abreast of the program's developments.

Work with Youth

Tie-in your activities with farm-youth groups such as the 4-H clubs, FFA and FHA. Interest these young people in the present and future benefits of rural electricity. Promote award contests.

Contact County Agents and solicit the Extension Service's aid in your youth program.

Work through educators such as the vocational agriculture teacher and the home economics teacher. These teachers can instruct boys and girls in the use of electricity.

Get Cooperation of Appliance Dealers

Have those dealers who sell and service power-use equipment attend your co-op meetings. Point out to them how rural electrification has boosted their income and will continue to help their business. Explain to them the principles of cooperation and how the two enterprises work for the benefit of each other. Earn their respect and gratitude and in this way drive a wedge between them and the opposition's propaganda.

Delegate reporting: L. E. O'Brien, Manager, Price Electric Cooperative,
Phillips, Wisconsin

Group 3. HOW TO KEEP MEMBERS INFORMED.

Informed members are members willing to take an active interest in the co-op's affairs. They should be thoroughly familiar with their rights and responsibilities as members. Imparting this information to the members is a responsibility of management. Here are some ways for doing this:

Management Should Be Informed

To have a well-informed and interested membership, it is necessary to have a manager and board of directors who will take the trouble to first inform themselves about what a co-op is and about their particular responsibilities. In this connection it was suggested that a so-called book of rules be compiled listing all policy resolutions reflected in the minutes of board meetings. This book could be used for the guidance of both management and the members.

Newsletter and Meetings

The Newsletter is one of the most effective media for getting the co-op story across to members, and its importance cannot be overemphasized. District and annual meetings are also helpful in this respect. To get the story over to the community, however, it is important that co-op managers take an active part in civic meetings. People in the community are interested in learning more about the electric co-op, and for that reason civic and service clubs such as Chamber of Commerce, Lions, Kiwanis, PTA, County Agricultural Committees, and local businessmen's associations should not be overlooked.

Contact Youth Groups

Working with young people is vital from a long-range point of view. The young people of today will be the members of tomorrow. It is important, therefore, to contact the 4-H clubs, FFA, and other youth groups and work with them, explaining the purposes and objectives of rural electrification and the co-op way of bringing it to the farmers.

Media Aids

Co-op management should avail itself of all media which can help keep members better informed. Radio should be used more and literature supplied by REA can be utilized by management to great advantage.

Delegate reporting: John L. Sedlacek, Manager, Northeast Nebraska Rural
Public Power District, Emerson, Nebraska

Group 4. MAKING BETTER USE OF POWER

Co-ops Help Members

Most rural electric cooperatives recognize their obligation to help their members make the most efficient use of the power they buy. But before the co-op can lend the greatest possible aid to members, it often has to solve problems which bear on the general question of efficient power use. For instance: (1) How can co-ops secure the cooperation of dealers in selling and servicing electrical equipment and appliances? (2) How can members best be taught to understand the need for inspection and re-inspection? (3) Which is better as an electrical adviser, a man or a woman?

Winning Dealer Cooperation

Various co-ops use various methods to secure dealer cooperation. Some co-ops give dealers lists of their members, thus making it possible for dealers to send advertising directly to the members. Where a dealer sells both gas and electrical appliances, however, this practice sometimes boomerangs on the co-op. In some such cases, attempts have been made to sell gas appliances to co-op members. Because of this, some co-ops refuse to give out their membership lists. However, the co-op itself in a number of cases mails literature for the dealer to the members. Where this is done, the co-op charges the dealer the actual cost of the operation.

District Meetings

Some of the larger co-ops divide their territory into districts and hold meetings in each district with dealers. And where membership lists are given out, the lists are broken down by districts -- so that a dealer may limit his mailings to members within the area he serves. In one State, the statewide association arranged a dinner meeting at which dealers were given the facts about the vast potential market afforded by the co-op members.

Demonstrations Helpful

Displays are usually helpful, and many co-ops furnish room for electrical exhibits at their headquarters buildings. There the members can inspect the equipment and appliances at their leisure. Then, if they wish to buy, they can get in touch with the dealer. Home demonstrations are sometimes arranged also.

Group 4. (Cont'd.)

Reinspections Essential

Most co-op members welcome an initial inspection of their wiring, since they understand the safety hazard they would face if there were no inspection. Frequently, though, they do not understand the need for reinspection. To develop member understanding on this point, several approaches have been tried.

A demonstration given at an annual meeting is helpful, particularly where it stresses the necessity of adequate wiring. When many farms are first wired, the wiring is sufficient at the outset for the lights and the few appliances the co-op member may have at the outset. However, as more equipment and appliances are added, troubles develop because the wiring is inadequate. If the members can be made to understand this, then they will be receptive to occasional reinspections.

Other Approaches

Sometimes co-op officials meet with new members before energization of the lines which will serve them. This is an excellent time to sell them on the desirability of adequate wiring from the outset -- so they can add equipment and appliances later as needed. In some States, a uniform wiring code is in effect -- and often this proves helpful.

Man vs. Woman

Where a co-op is large enough to afford two electrification advisers, it is good to have a man and a woman. The man usually does a better job in working with farmers on electrical equipment to boost farm production, while the woman is better in home planning. However, when a co-op can afford only one, which is better? Each co-op must answer this question for itself.

Where the big job is advising members about the use of electricity in their homes, many co-ops favor women advisers. Since 80 to 90 percent of the electricity consumed in the United States is consumed in the home, the woman has some advantage. However, in areas where electricity is being used more and more for farm production, a man may be preferred. Often he can do an acceptable job of working with farm women in home planning, while advising their husbands on utilizing electricity for dairying, poultry raising and other purposes.

Delegate reporting: Carl A. Wild, Manager, Cavalier Rural Electric Cooperative,
Langdon, North Dakota

Group 5. HOW TO OFFSET OPPOSITION PROPAGANDA

Utilities Spearhead Opposition

The utility theme, "business-managed, tax-paying electric companies," with its implication that co-ops are not business-managed, tax-paying systems, is continuously being spread through utility advertising in the press and over the radio. Utilities label rural electric co-ops as socialistic and un-American in an effort to destroy public confidence and respect for the REA program.

Bottlegas propaganda present serious obstacles to power use program in some areas, particularly where new rural electric lines are just being erected.

Co-ops Have a Better Story

Co-ops can meet the "no-taxes" charge with widespread information to members and to the public on the amount of taxes they pay. They can report the kinds of taxes -- local real estate and property taxes, gross revenue tax, social security tax, gas tax -- and amounts. Publicize these figures locally, perhaps using a picture of the manager delivering a tax check to the county treasurer, through all possible channels. Explain that co-ops operate on a service-at-cost basis, and do not pay an income tax simply because they do not make any profit. Formulate slogans on this theme for newsletter and other member communication pieces, and for the press and radio.

Publicize Loan Repayments

Publicize loan repayments, showing how much the co-op pays in principal and interest quarterly on its REA loan, to offset the business-managed propaganda of the utilities and the charge of Government subsidy. As one of the biggest businesses in the community, the co-op should demonstrate good business methods, present a business-like appearance in the office by maintaining an attractive office and a courteous staff. Take advantage of every opportunity to tell about area coverage, how the co-op is serving areas considered unprofitable by utilities, and the returns to the community from cooperative rural electrification.

In meeting bottlegas propaganda, educate members on the safety, speed and cleanliness of electricity in the home, and emphasize savings in current costs by going "all out electrically."

Tell Co-op Story Through Staff

An informed staff can play an important part in keeping members and the public informed and in offsetting opposition propaganda. Linemen, particularly, because they are in daily contact with members, should be trained in the co-op story, what the co-op does for members and the community.

Identify Your Co-op With the Community

Affiliate with local business organizations, work with civic groups, youth groups, women's groups, and with schools and churches to present your organization not only as a leading business enterprise within the community but also as a service institution.